

The Rambler Writes of Burnes Family Graves

THE bones of David Burnes, his wife, Anne, and their son James lie in Rock Creek cemetery. This interesting information has come to the Rambler in a letter from his friend, W. E. H. Merritt. Mr. Merritt says:

"Referring to your interesting story in today's paper, David Burnes, his wife and minor son are buried in Rock Creek Church cemetery. The graves are marked by three large and ancient slabs level with the ground. One is marked to the memory of David Burnes, esq., of Washington, who died in 1800. The second is marked with the name of Anne Burnes, wife (or consort) of David Burnes, died 1807. The third is marked with the name of James—I think—James Burnes, son of David Burnes, twenty years old. I have forgotten the date of his death as carved on the stone. Until I saw these three gravestones I did not know that David Burnes had any child but Marcia. I take it that in those days the death of a boy twenty years old would not give rise to any special notice in the few newspapers then existing unless some particular circumstance made the death a matter of unusual interest. As you said some time ago, newspaper space was then devoted to other matters. It is likely that in a few years the memory of the dead boy passed completely away. In the many accounts I have read of David Burnes, his daughter and the formation of the city of Washington I had never heard or read of but the one child. It was a surprise to me this summer to find these graves, and one of them a son of David. I had often wondered why no mention was made of the resting place of David Burnes, who of all the 'original proprietors' was most in notice and so much written of."

"The records of Rock Creek cemetery will probably show that the remains of these members of the Burnes family were removed there from another cemetery or from two other cemeteries and that this removal was directed by Marcia Van Ness. The Rambler has not come upon any facts bearing on the funeral of David Burnes, but in the National Intelligencer of February 2, 1807, there was a notice that Mrs. Anne Burnes, widow of the late David Burnes, died on Wednesday, January 28, at the age of sixty-seven years, and that on Thursday evening her remains, attended by a number of her relatives and friends, were deposited in the family graveyard about five miles from this place."

Some time ago, while pursuing the subject of David Burnes, his daughter Marcia and her husband, Gen. John P. Van Ness, the Rambler examined the inventory of the household and personal effects of the general returned on April 29, 1846, by Cornelius P. Van Ness, administrator, and Benjamin Ogle Tayloe and James Larned, appraisers appointed by the Orphans' Court of the District of Columbia. The personal property was appraised at \$51,028.95. From this inventory one may draw a picture of the interior fittings of the great house which stood in the square now occupied by the Pan-American building and its gardens, a house which very many Washington people remember as a ruin. Here follows a list of the general's wearing apparel:

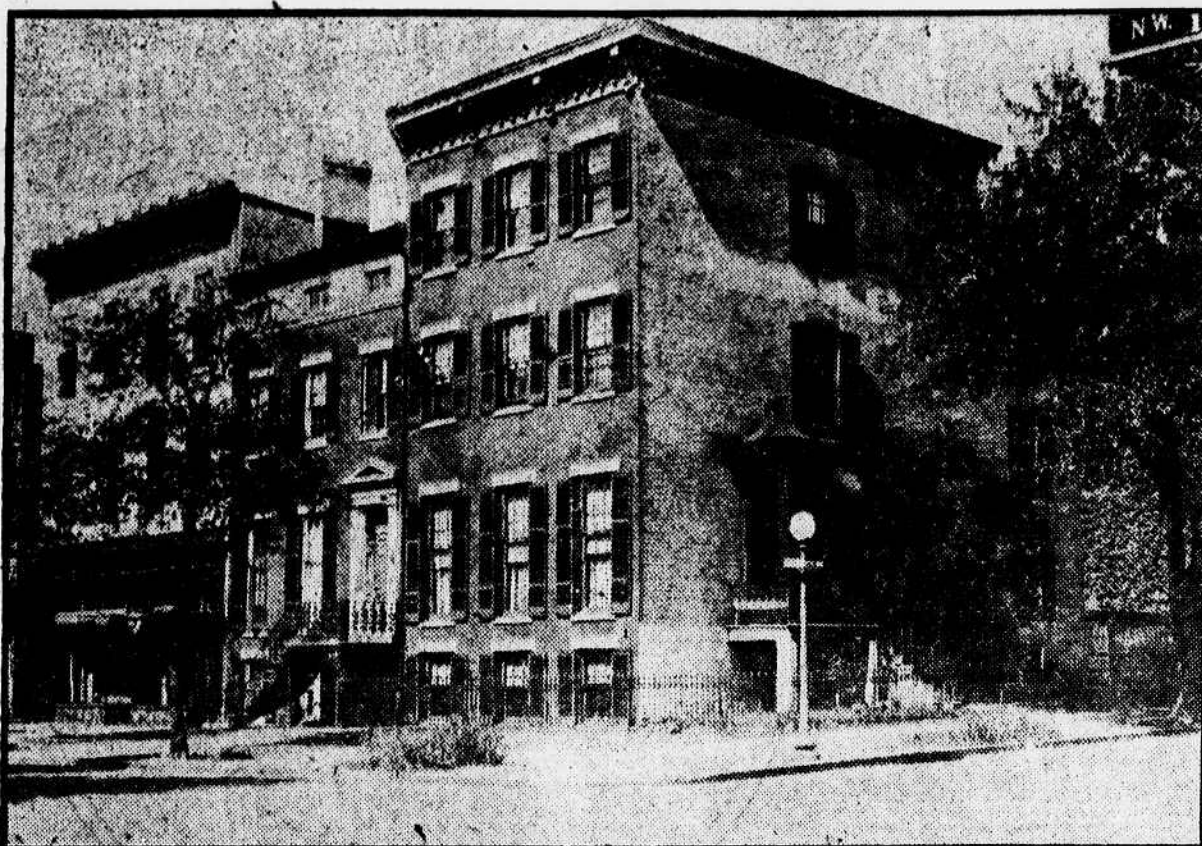
Thirteen linen shirts, \$20; eight flannel shirts, \$8; eight cotton shirts, \$6; ten vests, \$20; six undershirts, \$8; eleven pairs of hose at 12 cents per pair; one suit of clothes, \$20; several old suits of clothes, \$10; seven pairs summer pants, \$7; ten silk handkerchiefs, \$5; two cloaks, \$20; one surtout, \$10; one gold pencil, \$10; one silver pencil, \$1; watch, chain and seals (gold), \$100; snuff box, \$25; spectacles, \$5.

The furniture is inventoried under the headings: Southwest chamber and dressing room adjoining northwest dressing room, housekeeper's room, east chamber, drawing room, hall, library, parlor, wine cellar, kitchen and stable. The David Burnes cottage, which was torn down in 1894, is mentioned in the inventory as "the old house." The contents of the drawing room are set down as: One carpet, \$60; chandelier, \$75; cabinet, etc., \$100; pier tables, \$50; one dozen chairs and cushions, \$36; sofa and cushions to match, \$46; mahogany sofa, \$20; center table and cover, \$10; piano, \$40; two marble vases, \$4; two marble vases (large), \$15; two footstools, \$10; fender and andirons, \$15; shovel, tongs and marble stand, \$2. In the parlor the appraisers found the carpet and border worth \$120; one bookcase, \$85; one bookcase (smaller), \$30; one bookstand, \$10; one case and stand, \$10; one center table, \$15; one chandelier, \$15; one convex mirror, \$25; mantel lamp and vases, \$10; window curtains, rods, etc., \$35; two armchairs, \$5; one dozen other chairs, \$24; fender, \$5; shovel, tongs, etc., \$15; andirons, \$10; cabinet case, medals, etc., \$65; portraits of Mrs. Blount and Mr. Middleton, \$100; large and small paintings and engravings, \$23; music stool, \$5; lamp, \$10, and three rocking chairs, \$36.

The contents of the wine cellar seem to be disappointing. Down there the appraisers listed one bookcase, \$5; two paper cases, \$5; nine demijohns, \$6.75; long table and drawers, \$10; fender, \$3; seven casks sour wine, \$12; forty-one bottles of wine, \$10.

On Gen. Van Ness' farm, wherever that was, were listed 33 common sheep, at \$1.50 each; sundry hogs, 2 mules, 3 old horses, 1 pair of working oxen, 1 small bull, worth \$10; 5 yearling calves, 7 cows (small and thin), \$58; 2 cows with calves, \$20; 3 heifers, \$18; 2 young steers, \$12; wagon, ox cart, horse carts, plows and shovel. The enumeration of things on the farm is long and carefully made, but the foregoing is interesting as showing the price of live stock in the District, or very close to the District, about seventy years ago.

Gen. Van Ness' library, of something more than 1,000 volumes, was appraised at \$664.13. The title of each book is given in the inventory, and in the sale that followed in June, 1846, this library, comprising many books that would now seem to be priceless, or at least of very great



NORTHWEST CORNER OF H AND 10TH STREETS, ABOUT WHERE THE ORIGINAL BURNES HOME STOOD BEFORE THE CITY WAS SURVEYED.

price, was scattered among the homes of the old Washington families. A good many were bought by the Washington booksellers of that period, but hundreds of the books were bought by people both because they happened to want that particular book and because they wanted something as a souvenir of Gen. Van Ness, for the general was a popular man, not merely because he was wealthy and a prominent citizen, but because he had that quality of good nature which makes and holds friends. The return of the administrator and appraisers also contains a long list of silverware, plated ware and the contents of the garden and the greenhouse.

As part of the personal estate of Gen. Van Ness the administrator also returned: "Bank stock, Metropolitan Bank, nominal value \$49,875, market value \$39,900; 98 shares of Washington and Rockville Turnpike Company, \$653, about one-third of par value; 60 shares of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company; cost \$6,000, worth about \$2,400; slaves, Betty, quite old, no value; Julius, 25 years old, \$550; Simon, 60 years old, \$100; George, 32 years, \$550, and Sally, 60 years old, \$75."

In going through the results of the sale of Gen. Van Ness' goods at auction, by order of the administrator, on Tuesday, June 16, 1846, the Rambler finds among the purchasers and their purchases the following:

George H. Davis, three iron pots; Mrs. Walker, two cake molds; Mrs. Noyes, one ice cream mold; Mrs. Cox, sixty preserve jars; A. H. Cook, seven demijohns and contents, \$1.75; Mrs. George W. Riggs, center table and cover, \$6.50; Mr. Masi, two pier tables, \$34; Nicholas Callan, two mantel vases, \$6; Gov. C. P. Van Ness, carpet, \$21; Mr. Hellen, one dozen wine glasses, \$1.87; one dozen cut tumblers, \$3; and one dozen knives and forks, \$2; Lewis Johnson, preserve dish, \$2.21; J. M. Cutler, fish knife, \$1.25; Mrs. Maguire, one candlestick, \$4; S. Masi, two dozen plated nut pickers, \$2; J. W. Maury, beer mug (twelve ounces silver) \$16.20; J. C. Maguire, paintings, \$71.50; J. D. Brown, two engravings, 40 cents; T. M. Milburn, hall stove, \$6.12½; Commodore Morris, thermometer, \$3.25; Miss Woodside, sick chair, \$1.25; Mrs. Sweeney, feather bed (seventy-three pounds), \$17.52, and Mrs. Feron, twelve sets of window curtains, \$4.20.

Among the other buyers at that sale were: D. Rhea, Mrs. Lee, Mrs. Norman, Mrs. H. Johnson, Mrs. Fleishman, T. Gunton, Mr. Markoe, H. H. Holcombe, Mr. Tait, George Poe, Jr., J. B. H. Smith, S. L. Cole, F. Markoe, Mrs. Pritchard, Gen. Dix, W. B. Lewis, J. C. Wilson, E. W. Johnson, R. Keyworth, C. Alexander, E. S. Wright, F. A. Dickens, Miss McKnight, Mrs. Young, Mrs. Causton, Mrs. Wallace, T. Riggles, J. Pettibone, S. H. Loughlin, Mrs. Brent A. O. Cooke, B. Lancaster, Mrs. Brent, A. O. Cooke, B. Lancaster, Mrs. Page, Mr. Muncester, Mr. Duffrey, Mr. Drury and Mr. Shmon. B. Homans was the auctioneer and the net sum obtained was \$2,455.70.

Gen. Van Ness' pew, No. 82, in St. John's Church, sold for \$55, his stock in the Bank of the Metropolis was bought by Alexander Ray and J. E. Dow and his Rockville turnpike stock was sold to Benjamin Ogle Tayloe for \$653.37.

Among the buyers of books out of the Van Ness library were: Peter Force, R. Greenhow, C. W. Cathcart, H. P. Harvey, J. L. Chauncey, E. Burke, J. McGinniss, Z. W. Denham, W. M. Morrison, J. E. Norris, T. J. Johnson, J. M. Cutler, J. E. Dow, C. H. Carroll, Dr. Bohrer, H. L. Sylvester, P. R. Fendall, G. J. Abbott, J. C. McGuire, C. Hibbs, Mr. Carusi, G. McDuell and S. A. Elliot.

The Rambler has said that the David Burnes cottage, which stood in Van Ness Park, now the Pan-American Square, was torn down in 1894. That statement is based upon the following taken from The Star of May 21 of that year:

Davy Burnes' cottage, which has stood the storm since 1748, is no more. It was torn down yesterday by order of those engaged in laying out the Columbia Athletic Club's new grounds. In spite of its apparently dilapidated condition the structure required the most forcible handling to demolish. Down to the lowest brick in the foundation strong and united efforts were required to level it. It was allowed to stand until the last moment in the hope that it would not interfere with the various fields, but the necessity for its demolition became imperative. The venerators



MRS. SARAH VIRGINIA BURNES ZAHN, GREAT-GRANDNIECE OF DAVID BURNES.

of things historical can but regret its destruction. The cottage was situated in Van Ness Park, near the foot of 17th street, the property being in the name of the heirs of ex-Gov. Swann of Maryland.

In The Star of February 25, 1893, the Rambler finds the following in connection with Van Ness Square, and that part of the city which within a few years has developed in a way that seems like magic:

In a Neglected Section.—There is a gentle wave of activity sweeping over that section of the city south of New York avenue and west of 17th street.

Considerable real estate in that locality has changed hands and other deals are in progress. The revived interest in this section is accounted for by some of the prospect of the terminus of the Norfolk and Western railway being located there. The bill, as it now reads, fixes the terminus at the K street bridge, but it is claimed that authority will also be asked to allow the erection of the depot farther south. It is said that the site selected for the depot of the proposed road is the Van Ness square. The erection of the handsome building by the Corcoran Art Gallery is also mentioned as likely to have a favorable effect on property values, while it is not forgotten that the much-talked-of bridge across the river at the foot of New York avenue is one of the possibilities of the future.

Altogether this section of the city has been neglected for a good many years; it is now enjoying quite a healthy boom. It will be of interest to people who have no idea of the value of property in that locality to know that for the bulk of property the prices are still below \$1 per foot.

The great house which stood in Van Ness square up to a few years ago may have been built at about the time of the marriage of Gen. Van Ness and Marcia Burnes. That would put the date of its construction near 1802. Perhaps it was erected by Gen. Van Ness in anticipation of the marriage. The Rambler has not yet found any published account of the marriage of these two interesting persons, who were such prominent figures in the history of the young Washington. One might gather from the funeral discourse on Mrs. Van Ness by Rev. William Hawley of St. John's Episcopal Church that the great house had been made ready for the reception of the newly wedded pair. He said:

"About this time (Marcia's return from school in Baltimore) the splendid dwelling on Mansion square surrounded with beautiful shrubbery and evergreens and all the variety of flowers of every hue and with ever-admired woodbine and multi-flora creeping up its side, all throwing their rich perfume on the balmy atmosphere, was now prepared for the reception of the family. Leaving the cottage, which stands near this splendid mansion, under whose humble roof she had been born and nurtured and passed her infant years and youthful days, she now took possession of her new abode."

Not many facts are to be extracted from Dr. Hawley's description of the overgreens and woodbine, but it contains the inference that the house was built before and occupied immediately after the marriage on May 9, 1802, that date being Marcia's twentieth

birthday. Rev. Mr. Hawley must have known all the facts.

The building of the house is ascribed by Glenn Brown in his history of the capital to Benjamin H. Latrobe and the time of its building being set as 1812. Mr. Brown says: "While in Washington Latrobe designed St. John's Church, which stands at the corner of 16th and H streets, opposite Lafayette Square. In 1812 he designed the Van Ness mansion, one of the notable residences of the early days in Washington. He also designed Brentwood, a mansion of dignity and magnitude in the suburbs of the city in 1818, and the residence of Commodore Decatur, which is still standing on Lafayette square, but remodeled out of all semblance to its original appearance. The other residences mentioned still remain, but in a dilapidated condition."

If the house was built from designs by Latrobe it was probably not built at the time of Marcia's marriage, for Latrobe was appointed architect of the Capitol in 1803 and most likely was not in Washington in 1802. What follows is from "The Documentary History of the Construction and Development of the United States Capitol Building and Grounds," published as a government document in 1804:

In 1803 Benjamin H. Latrobe was appointed by President Jefferson. He continued his service until 1817, with the exception of the period of the last war with Great Britain. He restored portions of the building destroyed during that war. Mr. Latrobe was born and educated in his profession in England, coming to America in 1790. While living in Philadelphia he designed and constructed many public buildings in that city. It is to his genius we owe the design and finish of the period of the last war with Great Britain. He designed the building destroyed during that war. Mr. Latrobe was born and educated in his profession in England, coming to America in 1790. While living in Philadelphia he designed and constructed many public buildings in that city. It is to his genius we owe the design and finish of the period of the last war with Great Britain. He designed the building destroyed during that war. Mr. Latrobe was born and educated in his profession in England, coming to America in 1790. 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